The Time for Strongman Populism Has Passed: How Trump Missed His Opportunity to Enact Pandemic Socialism and The Greatest Crisis Response in Modern Political History

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No matter your view of Trump or Trumpism, it is undeniable that it works. Not in terms of enacting policies that benefit the Republican base or Americans writ large, but at activating White angst to vote for Trump. Trump could easily have coasted to reelection, which is still no impossible, if he had taken the bull by the horns and reined in Covid. Instead, he chose the path of theater, partisan mudslinging and Glenn Beck-tier conspiracy theories. The public were begging for a leader to unite us during this pandemic. Instead, we got Gomer Pyle: hilarious perhaps, but incompetent at best (from Spencer):

> After years of relative peace for the American empire, Trump was challenged in the final year of his term with a crisis of Biblical proportions—a plague from the Far East that brought the world to its knees. Politically speaking, it was a gift, if Trump were willing to unwrap it. Trump achieved his highest approval ratings of his term in the first half of May 2020—49 percent—weeks after he had officially declared the Coronavirus a national emergency. Great stress brings out "animal instincts"; people desperately want to "follow the leader." At that moment, Trump was, at least potentially, poised to transcend polarization.
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> For all of the shrill talk about Trump being a "fascist," the reality is that Benito Mussolini would have relished the chance to mobilize the nation under "pandemic socialism." And if Trump governed more like a fascist—perhaps openly donning a knightly hazmat suit during press briefings—he would have a much better chance of being re-elected.
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> No leader on Earth has paid a political price for "overreacting" to Coronavirus—even if some have, indeed, overreacted. Dr. Anthony Fauci, who has consistently urged lockdowns, has had an approval rating in the mid-to-upper 60s on his handling of the pandemic—double that of Trump. The nation was clearly begging to be given marching orders by a strongman. Trump, for his part, chose the "power of positive thinking," a uniquely American form of Christianity articulated by Norman Vincent Peale, a minister who presided over Trump's first wedding. Trump's response to Coronavirus will forever be remembered by his claims that it was a "Democrat hoax," that it will go away in the spring "like a miracle," various goofy proposals for instant cures, and his fretting about the health of the Dow Jones Industrial Index.
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> By October, Trump was [losing seniors]—those most vulnerable to Covid-19—by 10 points in the all-important state of Pennsylvania. Voters over the age of 65 would seem to be the natural constituency of any conservative; 65 percent of them voted for Mitt Romney in 2012. Yet in 2020, "the olds" have a voting profile much like their self-centered, left-wing grandchildren.

In sum, Trump was given the opportunity to enact genuine economic and social populism. Instead, he chose Fox News liberalism. He could've locked down the country martial law style, bailed out the American people using socialism (UBI, rent/mortgage/debt/utility freezes, Medicare for All, sent masks to every household via Post Office, bailed out small businesses, promised a free vaccine) and swiftly united the country behind the science and scientists. Had he done that, his political leadership and subsequent response would've been studied in history books in political science class. Journalists would have no choice but to praise him and ignore the petty elitist infighting. The vilest antifa activist would've chiseled his face onto Mount Rushmore.

It could've been, and I'm not exaggerating, the single greatest unifying moment and crisis response in American History. Move over, FDR, here comes Donald Trump! Alas, we got none of that. We didn't even get a response. We got, in short, an anti-response. And that, my dear readers, is and will be Trump's legacy.

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